

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 6, 2003

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MARKEY CALLS BUSH SMALLPOX VACCINE COMPENSATION PROPOSAL "VAGUE AND LIMITED"

WASHINGTON, DC -- Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA), a senior Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee and Select Committee on Homeland Security, and sponsor of H.R. 865 to provide compensation to those harmed by smallpox vaccinations, today released the following statement in response to the Bush Administration's decision to finally concede the need for a compensation package for the Smallpox Vaccination Program:

"Today's action represents an acknowledgement that the Administration's Smallpox Vaccination Program is failing due to a lack of comprehensive safeguards for health care workers. Unfortunately the Bush Administration's compensation proposal is not likely to change this dynamic because it lacks the assurances needed to generate confidence in the program and to induce skeptical healthcare workers to take the vaccine.

"Right now only 12,000 out of 500,000 people have volunteered to be vaccinated. At this rate it will take at least 2 years to get through the first phase of this program. The Institute of Medicine reported that the Administration's Smallpox Vaccination Program needs better safeguards, compensation for victims, and decisions based on medicine, not politics. The Bush compensation program is not only delayed and inadequate but it fails to provide the necessary safeguards.

"We need to act now to pass H.R. 865, the 'Smallpox Vaccination Compensation and Safety Act,' which I have sponsored with Rep. Henry Waxman and others. This bill is not only more fair with respect to compensation, but it also provides much-needed safeguards such as funding to states to provide for education, screening, medical surveillance, and treatment of health care workers and other affected persons; protections against discrimination in the workplace, and compensation for those harmed by adverse reactions to the smallpox vaccine.

"We must treat our healthcare workers who will put themselves on the front line during a public health emergency with the respect they deserve by providing them with the best safeguards to prevent injuries and the best means for recovery in addition sufficient compensation."

The text of H.R. 865 may be found at www.house.gov/markey.

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